



ILLINOIS YOUTH COURT ASSOCIATION



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www.IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov

Spring 2006

Newsletter

Vol. 3

Statewide Youth Court Summits a Success

In a continuous effort to foster the growing interest in youth courts, the Office of Attorney General Lisa Madigan hosted a series of youth court training summits across the state. Summits were held in Galesburg, Effingham, and Gurnee. The series was a resounding success with over 250 attendees (representing more than 80 counties) receiving training. Attendees included representatives from state's attorney's offices, school districts, police departments, probation departments, community service agencies, and teen court programs.

The Illinois Youth Court Association designed this series of summits to enhance existing youth courts and to provide the necessary resources to start new programs. The summits were made possible through a generous grant from the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority (IVPA).

Each summit featured a series of panel discussions. The panel topics included: an overview of how youth courts work, a presentation on the

principles of balanced and restorative justice, an explanation of a funding mechanism available to all Illinois counties, and a presentation from youth who actively participate in a teen court.

For most summit participants, the Youth Panel was a favorite. Youth volunteers from Coles, Knox, Macon, and Lake counties spoke about their experiences volunteering on a youth court. The youths' presentations emphasized that participating in a youth court program is a positive experience for everyone involved.

Funding was also an important issue addressed at the summits. Youth court programs have traditionally received their start-up and operating costs from grants and donations. However, with the passage of House Bill 307 (Public Act 093-0892), effective January 1, 2005, counties now have the ability to pass a resolution to increase penalties for certain criminal offenses as a source of funding for op-

eration and administration of youth courts and other diversion programs. At the summits a panel was dedicated to discussing how to get a resolution passed.

The Attorney General's Office would like to extend a sincere thank you to all those who participated in and attended the Youth Court Summits. We'd also like to thank our summit partners: the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police, Illinois Juvenile Officers' Association, Illinois Probation and Court Services Association, Illinois Coalition for Community Services, Constitutional Rights Foundation of Chicago, and Illinois State's Attorneys Association.

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Chief Operating Officer of NICASA Shares His Youth Court Experiences with Summit Participants

Bruce Johnson, the Chief Operating Officer of Northern Illinois Council on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse (NICASA), kicked off the Northern Illinois Youth Court summit by sharing his experiences. The following are excerpts from his remarks at the summit:

I have been fortunate enough to experience teen court from two perspectives. One as a police chief first helping to bring teen court to Lake County more than 10 years ago, and secondly in my current role as NICASA's chief operating officer. Over the last 10 years I have personally known and observed many youths referred to teen court and watched the very positive interaction between the youth, parents, police, volunteers, and community throughout the process. Police departments, although typically skeptical and not the most loving of change, quickly embraced teen court because the process was much more effective than a trip to branch

court. Officers have expressed surprise at how serious the teen volunteers and offenders approached the process and appreciation of the creative sentencing options imposed by the teens' peers, many of which had a greater effect than branch court.

I also know first hand from compiling the data and statistics that teen court really reduces recidivism. This is significant because there is a law enforcement, school, community, and society law of percentages which means that we spend a greatly disproportionate amount of time with a small percentage of our teens. This can have a bad systemic effect on both that small percentage of teens as well as our communities as a whole. By finding effective programs such as teen court we can reduce this number, prevent teens from continuing to make bad decisions, stop them from becoming trapped in the bigger system, afford

them an opportunity to change and contribute, enable us to spend more time with teens who are at risk, allow them a future which is not limited by a criminal record, and reinforce positive behaviors and good citizenship as well as role modeling for those teens who volunteer and those who choose to change.

One of the things I have heard over and over for more than 20 years is that there are few positive activities for children to participate in. This holds true for teens who have stayed out of trouble as well as those who have made mistakes. You only have to read the sad headlines in the daily papers to see the consequences of poor choices, lack of supervision, and teen mistakes. Car accidents, gang activity, alcohol and drug effects, and the list goes on.

Teen court is an excellent example of a positive activity! Teen court protects against negative influences, enhances protective factors, develops leadership skills, provides training and an insight into the criminal justice system, reinforces positive choices, increases teen resiliency, and connects the teen and their parents with their local police departments, schools, social service agencies, community, and society as a whole.

After ten years and thousands of teens served directly, and many more indirectly by NICASA's teen courts, I can say without hesitation that our communities are better for having teen courts. Our future society and its future leaders, OUR TEENS, are also better equipped to succeed and stay out of the sad headlines.



Youth Panel Presentation at Gurnee Youth Court Summit
Photo Courtesy of Tom Delany, *The News Sun*

Little Book of Restorative Justice

Howard Zehr is the author of *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*. Mr. Zehr, co-director of the graduate Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University, describes the book as “a brief description or overview – the *Cliff Notes*, if you will, of restorative justice” and “an effort to articulate the restorative justice concept in straightforward terms.”

He further states, “The *Little Book of Restorative Justice* is for those who have heard the term and are curious about what it implies. It is also for those

who are involved in the field but are becoming unclear or losing track of what they are trying to do.”

The Illinois Youth Court Association has developed a guide to accompany this book in order to assist youth court programs in incorporating restorative justice principles. In particular, the guide suggests activities that correspond to sections of the book. This guide is available at: www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/communities/youthadvocacy/Little_Book_Guide.pdf.



The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority has a limited supply of copies of the *Little Book of Restorative Justice* available at no cost to interested youth court programs and other juvenile justice professionals in Illinois.

To request a copy, please contact Jessica Ashley by e-mail at: jashley@icjia.state.il.us.

Peer Jury Training Opportunities

The Illinois Center for Violence Prevention (ICVP) provides technical assistance, intensive consultations, and trainings designed to build the capacity of organizations and communities to identify and implement comprehensive violence prevention efforts. They are currently developing trainings on peer jury

best practices through their “Training & Coaching Institute.”

For more information on these trainings, please contact:
Jan Stanton, Director
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National Youth Court Center to Offer Professional Development Institute

The National Youth Court Center (NYCC) is hosting its third Youth Court Professional Development Institute on June 14-17, 2006, in San Diego, California. NYCC serves as an information clearing-house and provides training, technical assistance, and resource materials to assist jurisdictions in developing and operating youth

court programs. The Youth Court Professional Development Institute is a highly interactive event with a series of intensive training sessions designed for youth court coordinators and administrators with more advanced training on youth courts. Session topics will include program staffing, researching, managing, funding, and volunteer recruitment and training.

Register by April 21, 2006, to qualify for the reduced early registration fee of \$150. After April 21, the registration fee will be \$185. Registrations will be accepted until May 12, 2006. For more information about this and future NYCC training opportunities, visit www.youthcourt.net/training_ta/current.htm or call (859) 244-8193.



Prefer E-mail?

If you received a hard copy of this newsletter and would prefer to receive future Youth Court Newsletters by e-mail in PDF format, please send your e-mail address to Amy Zimmerman at azimmerman@atg.state.il.us.

We Need the Next Generation of Youth Court Research

by Jeffery Butts, Ph.D., University of Chicago

Researchers have finally started to pay attention to the growing youth court movement in the U.S.

The number of evaluation studies about youth courts or teen courts has increased significantly in the past five years. The results of these studies inevitably show that youth courts hold a lot of promise for state and local juvenile justice systems.

It looks as if youth courts work, but why do they work? What is it about youth courts that seems to reduce recidivism? Researchers are not yet trying to answer these questions.

Merely doing more studies will not advance our knowledge of youth courts; nor will it attract the political support and funding that is so important for a growing program model like youth courts. What we need are new types of studies.

Researchers need to start identifying which parts of the youth court model are most effective. One of the most critical questions is whether youth-run courts are more effective than adult-run courts.

Not all teen courts are created alike. In some programs, youth are responsible for nearly everything, including all facets of the public hearing process and all courtroom procedures necessary to complete each case.

In other courts, youth may serve as the lawyers, clerks, and bailiffs, but an adult judge calls the cases, instructs the jury, guides the ques-

tioning of defendants, and determines an appropriate sentence for each case. Even a casual observer would conclude that youth participation in such a courtroom was less extensive.

Do these program differences matter for youth outcomes? Which model is more effective?

It would seem obvious that these two different styles of youth court could have very different effects on youth volunteers, youth defendants, and their parents. Courts run by youth themselves may be more effective in encouraging youth responsibility and community engagement. All participants in such a process would perceive that the young people working in the court were respected and valued by the community.

On the other hand, it is far more difficult to run a well-managed courtroom without adult involvement. Which is more important: the continuity and managerial competence shown by the youth court, or the youth orientation?

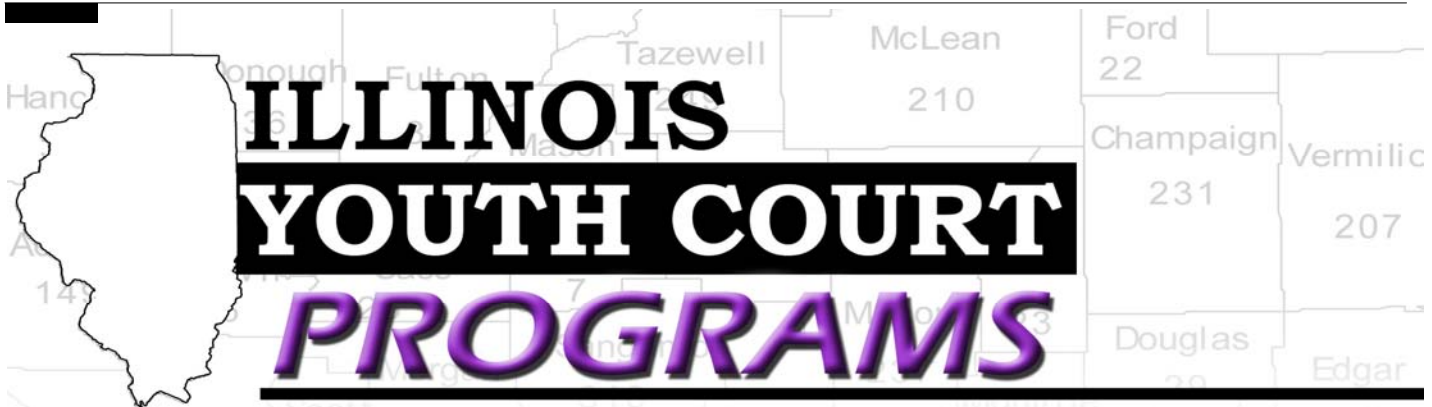
Amazingly, not a single study has seriously investigated this question. Youth courts are proliferating at a rapid pace in the United States, but there is no research information to guide the choices of local officials as they develop new courts. Many communities may adopt the adult judge model because it is the easier model to manage, and it is more familiar to local juvenile justice officials. But, is this the right approach to take? Researchers need to start developing evaluation designs that test the

impact of different youth court models, and youth court programs should start demanding that they do exactly that.

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Visit us on the Web:
www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/communities/youthadvocacy/iyca.html



The following is a list of youth court programs in Illinois. To better serve you, we need current contact information and an e-mail address for each program. Please send additions or corrections to azimmerman@atg.state.il.us.

2nd District Peer Court

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Antioch/Lindenhurst Teen Court

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Aurora Peer Jury

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Austin High School Peer Jury Program

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Barrington Peer Jury

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Bellwood Peer Jury

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Bloomington Youth Peer Jury

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Oneida Fehring, Peer Jury Coordinator

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Pike County Youth Court Program

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Prospect Heights Peer Jury

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 Prospect Heights Police Department
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Providence St. Mels High School Peer Jury

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Rich Township Peer Jury Program

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Rock Island Peer Justice Program

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 Youth Service Bureau
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Rolling Meadows P.D. Peer Jury

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Roosevelt Peer Jury Program

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Schaumburg Peer Jury

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Skokie Peer Jury

Detective Thomas Nelis, Peer Jury Coordinator
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Stephenson County Teen Court

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Sterling Peer Jury

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Sycamore Police Peer Jury

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Teen Court

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Thomas Jefferson Middle School Peer Jury

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Tilden High School Peer Jury Program

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Tinley Park Peer Jury

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Walter Payton High School Peer Jury Program

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Warren Township Teen Court

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Warren Township Teen Court

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Washington High School Peer Jury Program

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Waukegan Teen Court

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Western Springs Juvenile Peer Jury

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Westinghouse High School Peer Jury Program

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Wheeling Police Peer Jury

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Whitney Young High School Peer Jury Program

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Wood Dale/Bensenville Peer Jury

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Worth Township Peer Jury

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A Snapshot of Illinois Youth Court Programs

The Illinois Youth Court Association collects information from Illinois communities that implement youth courts. In this issue we spotlight the youth court programs of the City of Chicago Police Department and the Northern Illinois Council on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse (NICASA). Detective Clifton Underwood of the Chicago Police Department and Ms. Candace Fujii of NICASA offered the following information. *We would like to feature your program, too. Please send information on your program to Amy Zimmerman by e-mail at azimmerman@atg.state.il.us or via fax at (312) 814-5727.*

What type of youth court model does your program utilize?

CPD: The Chicago Police Department utilizes the peer jury model.

NICASA: NICASA uses the adult judge model.

From where do the referrals for youth court originate?

CPD: All of the cases heard originate in the police districts of occurrence.

NICASA: The cases originate in the police departments and school resource officers at the schools.

What types of cases are heard within the program?

CPD: The cases vary, but all are minor or misdemeanor cases. Mostly battery, assaults, and thefts.

NICASA: Curfew, criminal trespass to property and motor vehicles, possession of tobacco, criminal damage to property, disorderly conduct, possession of stolen property, retail theft, theft under \$300, truancy, telephone harassment, possession/consumption of alcohol, possession of marijuana, possession of drug paraphernalia, assault, bomb threats, reckless conduct, simple battery, unlawful possession/use of weapon, unlawful possession of fireworks, obscenity.

What is your recidivism rate?

CPD: The recidivism rate has not been determined at this time. Usually if a minor does not comply with the sanctions of peer jury, the case is marked non-compliance and transferred to juvenile court. After it is transferred, the case is flagged and the subject is ineligible for peer jury again.

NICASA: For those who successfully complete the program, the recidivism rate is approximately 13%. For those who are no-shows or unsuccessfully complete the program, approximately 27%.

What methods are used to teach the students Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ)?

CPD: Most of the BARJ implementations are utilized through letters of apology or a return visit to the victim of the case where restoration can be attempted.

NICASA: Use of victim impact statements, appropriate community service in the community in which they offended, classes on decision making, anger management, girls' risk reduction, as well as drug and alcohol evaluations and behavior screenings. Referrals are made based on the results. [Offenders] may also have to do letters of apologies, visit with fire department paramedics or police officers to obtain information and insight for essays they are required to write.

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What is the approximate number of cases heard per year through your youth court program?

CPD: Approximately 1,000 cases citywide.

NICASA: Approximately 300-400 cases.

**Did you know that
Illinois is the nation's
leader with over 100
youth court programs?**

What is the approximate number of agreements created/completed?

CPD: Approximately 70% of our agreements are completed.

NICASA: Between June 2003-2005, out of the 539 referrals, there were 423 successful completions (79%), 94 non-completions (17%), and 22 no-shows (4%).

What is the approximate number of jurors/adults who participated in your youth court program last year?

CPD: Each district has a minimum of 6 jurors and 2 adults. The number varies throughout the city. Five districts have approximately 20 or more jurors with 4 to 6 adults.

NICASA: Between 150-225 volunteers.



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